This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

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1. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need based on documents and an index stored on a computer-readable medium comprising the steps of:

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion;

identifying one or more documents in the index that contain a match for at least a portion of the query;

locating one or more strings which are matches for the unspecified portion in the query within the identified one or more documents;

and

~~producing results in which~~ ranking each of said one or more strings ~~is ranked~~ which are matches resulting from the query in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more documents.

2. (Original) A method according to claim 1, wherein the index identifies documents containing terms or groups of terms that satisfy restrictions.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the documents are accessible over the Internet.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the documents comprise World Wide Web pages.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

accumulating information about a match as it is located.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

assigning a score to a match.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the locating step comprises locating a match within a plurality of documents, and wherein the score reflects the number of times an instance of the match is located among a plurality of documents.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

outputting one or more of the matches, or a portion thereof, thereby providing a result for the query.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8, further comprising the step of:

outputting identifiers or locations of one or more of the documents that contain a match or portion thereof that was output in the outputting step.

10. (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein a location of a document comprises a uniform resource locator.

11. (Original) The method of claim 9, further comprising the step of:

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ranking the documents that contain a match, and wherein the second outputting step comprises outputting the document identifiers or locations of the documents that contain a match in an order based on the ranking.

12. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein the ranking step comprises ranking a document based on the number of times a match is located within the document.

13. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of storing data identifying terms that satisfy restrictions.

14. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the query comprises a partially unspecified term.

15. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the partially unspecified term includes a restriction that comprises a morphological feature.

16. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the partially unspecified term includes a restriction that comprises a syntactic feature.

17. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the partially unspecified term includes a restriction that comprises a computer program.

18. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the locating step comprises:

locating a potential match for the query within a document, wherein the potential match matches the specified portion of the query and wherein the potential match includes a portion that corresponds to the unspecified term; and

determining whether the portion of the potential match that corresponds to the unspecified term satisfies a restriction included in the partially unspecified term.

19. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the index comprises locations of terms within documents.

20. (Original) The method of claim 19, wherein the locating step comprises:

determining the location of a term in the query within a document using the index; and

locating a match for the query based on the location of the term within the document.

21. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

storing a match or a portion thereof.

22. (Original) The method of claim 21, further comprising the step of:

storing a score for the match or portion thereof.

23. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

storing a plurality of matches or portions thereof.

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24. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

storing a score for a plurality of matches or portions thereof.

25. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

ranking a plurality of the located matches or portions thereof.

26. (Original) The method of claim 25, wherein the ranking step comprises:

ranking a located match or a portion thereof based on the content of a plurality of documents identified in the identifying step.

27. (Original) The method of claim 25, wherein the ranking step comprises:

ranking a located match or a portion thereof based on the content of a majority of documents identified in the identifying step.

28. (Original) The method of claim 25, wherein the ranking is based on one or more features selected from the list consisting of:

the location of a match within a document, a weight assigned to a document that contains a match, the age of a document that contains a match, the source of a document that contains a match, and a format feature of a match within a document.

29. (Original) The method of claim 25, wherein the ranking step comprises:

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ranking a located match or a portion thereof based on the number of times an instance of the match is located within a plurality of documents identified in the identifying step.

30. (Original) The method of claim 25, wherein the ranking step comprises:

ranking a located match or a portion thereof based on the number of times an instance of the match is located within a majority of documents identified in the identifying step.

31. (Original) The method of claim 25, 28, or 29 further comprising the step of:

outputting one or more of the located matches, or one or more portions thereof, in an order based on the ranking, thereby providing a result for the query.

32. (Original) The method of claim 31, further comprising the step of:

outputting an indication of the ranking of a located match or portion thereof.

33. (Original) The method of claim 31 further comprising the step of:

outputting identifiers or locations of one or more of the documents that contain a match or a portion thereof that was output in the outputting step.

34. (Original) The method of claim 33 wherein a location of a document comprises a uniform resource locator.

35. (Original) The method of claim 34, further comprising the step of:

ranking a plurality of documents, and wherein the second outputting step comprises outputting identifiers or locations of the documents in an order based on the ranking.

36. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need based on documents and an index stored on a computer-readable medium comprising the steps of:

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion;

identifying one or more documents in the index that contain a match for at least a portion of the query;

locating a plurality of strings which are matches for the unspecified portion in the query within the identified one or more documents;

and

~~producing results in which~~ ranking each of said plurality strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more documents.

37. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need based on documents and an index stored on a computer-readable medium comprising the steps of:

storing an index identifying documents containing terms;

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion;

identifying one or more documents in the index that contain a match for at least a portion of the query;

locating one or more strings which are matches for the unspecified portion in the query within the identified one or more documents;

and

~~producing results in which~~ ranking each of said one or more strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more documents.

38. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need comprising the steps of:

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion, the unspecified portion including an unspecified term;

identifying a string which is a match for the unspecified portion in the query within a body of information stored on a computer-readable medium; and

~~producing results in which~~ ranking said string which is a match resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within a body of information.

39. (Original) The method of claim 38, wherein the body of information is accessible over the Internet.

40. (Original) The method of claim 38, wherein the body of information comprises World Wide Web pages.

41. (Original) The method of claim 38, wherein the query comprises a partially unspecified term.

42. (Original) The method of claim 38, further comprising the step of:

outputting the match or a portion thereof.

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43. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need comprising the steps of:

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion, the unspecified portion including an unspecified term;

identifying a plurality of strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within a body of information stored on a computer-readable medium; and

~~producing results in which~~ ranking each of said plurality of strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within a body of information.

44. (Original) The method of claim 43, wherein the body of information is accessible over the Internet.

45. (Original) The method of claim 43, wherein the body of information comprises World Wide Web pages.

46. (Original) The method of claim 43, further comprising the step of:

outputting one or more of the matches or portions thereof.

47. (Original) The method of claim 43, further comprising the steps of:

ranking a plurality of the matches or portions thereof; and

outputting one or more of the matches or portions thereof in an order based on the ranking.

48. (Original) The method of claim 47, wherein the ranking is based on the number of times an instance of a match or a portion thereof is identified.

49. (Original) The method of claim 43, further comprising the step of:

assigning a score to a match.

50. (Original) The method of claim 43, further comprising the step of:

storing a match.

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51. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need comprising the steps of:

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion, the unspecified portion including a designated unspecified term;

identifying a plurality of strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within a body of information stored on a computer-readable medium; and

~~producing results in which~~ ranking each of said plurality of strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within a body of information.

52. (Original) The method of claim 51, wherein the body of information is accessible over the Internet.

53. (Original) The method of claim 51, wherein the body of information comprises World Wide Web pages.

54. (Original) The method of claim 51, further comprising the step of:

outputting one or more of the portions of the identified matches that correspond to the designated unspecified term.

55. (Original) The method of claim 51, further comprising the step of:

ranking, for a plurality of the identified matches, the portion of each match that corresponds to the designated unspecified term.

56. (Original) The method of claim 55, wherein the ranking is based on the number of times an instance of a match including the portion that corresponds to the designated unspecified term is identified.

57. (Original) The method of claim 55, further comprising the step of:

outputting one or more of the portions that correspond to the designated unspecified term in an order based on the ranking.

58. (Original) The method of claim 55, further comprising the step of:

outputting one or more of the matches in an order based on the ranking.

59. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need based on documents and an index stored on a computer-readable medium comprising the steps of:

storing contexts for terms, wherein a context occurs in a document;

storing information identifying a document in which a context occurs;

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion;

identifying one or more strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within the contexts; and

~~producing results in which~~ ranking each of said one or more strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more contexts.

60. (Original) The method of claim 59, wherein the index identifies documents containing terms that satisfy restrictions.

61. (Original) The method of claim 59, further comprising the step of storing data identifying terms that satisfy restrictions.

62. (Original) The method of claim 59, wherein the query comprises a partially unspecified term.

63. (Original) The method of claim 62, wherein the partially unspecified term includes a restriction that comprises a morphological feature.

64. (Original) The method of claim 63, wherein the partially unspecified term includes a restriction that comprises a syntactic feature.

65. (Original) The method of claim 63, wherein the partially unspecified term includes a restriction that comprises a computer program.

66. (Original) The method of claim 59, further comprising the step of:

locating, among the stored contexts, contexts that contain a match for at least one term in the query; and wherein the identifying step comprises identifying matches for the query within the located contexts.

67. (Original) The method of claim 59, wherein the storing step comprises:

storing, for a plurality of contexts, a finite state automaton that represents the context.

68. (Original) The method of claim 59, further comprising the step of:

outputting one or more of the identified matches, or portions thereof, thereby providing a result for the query.

69. (Original) The method of claim 68, further comprising the step of:

outputting identifiers or locations of one or more of the documents that contain the matches or portions thereof that were output in the outputting step.

70. (Original) The method of claim 69, wherein a location of a document comprises a uniform resource locator.

71. (Original) The method of claim 69, further comprising the step of:

ranking a plurality of documents, and wherein the second outputting step comprises outputting identifiers or locations of the documents in an order based on the ranking.

72. (Original) The method of claim 59, wherein the identifying step comprises:

locating a potential match for the query within a context, wherein the potential match matches the specified portion of the query and wherein the potential match includes a portion that corresponds to the unspecified term; and

determining whether the portion of the potential match that corresponds to the unspecified term satisfies a restriction included in the partially unspecified term.

73. (Original) The method of claim 59, further comprising the step of:

assigning a score to a match or a portion thereof.

74. (Original) The method of claim 59, further comprising the step of:

storing a match or a portion thereof.

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75. (Original) The method of claim 59, wherein the identifying step comprises identifying a plurality of matches, further comprising the step of:

ranking a plurality of the identified matches or portions thereof.

76. (Original) The method of claim 75, wherein the ranking is based on one or more features selected from the list consisting of:

the location of a match within a document, a weight assigned to a document that contains a match, the age of a document that contains a match, the source of a document that contains a match, and a format feature of a match within a document.

77. (Original) The method of claim 75, wherein the ranking step comprises:

ranking an identified match or portion thereof based on the number of times an instance of the match is identified within a plurality of contexts.

78. (Original) The method of claim 75, wherein the ranking step comprises:

ranking a plurality of the identified matches or portions thereof based on information associated with a plurality of contexts that contain a match for the query.

79. (Original) The method of claim 75, 77, or 78, further comprising the step of:

outputting one or more of the identified matches or portions thereof in an order based on the ranking, thereby providing a result for the query.

80. (Original) The method of claim 79, further comprising the step of:

outputting identifiers or locations of one or more of the documents that contain the matches or portions thereof that were output in the outputting step.

81. (Original) The method of claim 80, wherein the location of a document comprises a uniform resource locator.

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82. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need based on documents stored on a computer-readable medium comprising the steps of:

storing an index identifying documents containing terms;

storing contexts for terms, wherein a context occurs in a document;

storing information identifying a document in which a context occurs;

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion;

identifying one or more strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within the contexts; and

~~producing results in which~~ ranking each of said one or more strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more contexts.

83. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need based on documents stored on a computer-readable medium comprising the steps of:

storing an index identifying documents containing terms;

storing contexts for terms, wherein a context occurs in a document;

storing information identifying a document in which a context occurs;

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion;

identifying a plurality of strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within the contexts; and

~~producing results in which~~ ranking each of said plurality strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more contexts.

84. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need based on documents and an index stored on a computer-readable medium comprising the steps of:

storing contexts for terms, wherein the context occurs in a document;

storing information identifying a document in which a context occurs;

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion;

identifying a plurality of strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within the contexts ;and

~~producing results in which~~ ranking each of said plurality of strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more contexts.

85. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need comprising the steps of:

storing contexts in which terms occur;

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion;

identifying one or more strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within the contexts; and

~~producing results in which~~ ranking each of said one or more strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more contexts.

86. (Original) The method of claim 85, wherein the storing step comprises storing an index identifying contexts containing terms.

87. (Original) The method of claim 86, wherein the index identifies contexts containing terms or groups of terms that satisfy restrictions.

88. (Original) The method of claim 85, wherein the contexts are obtained from documents accessible over the Internet.

89. (Original) The method of claim 85, wherein the contexts are obtained from World Wide Web pages.

90. (Original) The method of claim 85, further comprising the step of storing data identifying terms that satisfy restrictions.

91. (Original) The method of claim 85, wherein the query comprises a partially unspecified term.

92. (Original) The method of claim 91, wherein the partially unspecified term includes a restriction that comprises a morphological feature.

93. (Original) The method of claim 91, wherein the partially unspecified term includes a restriction that comprises a syntactic feature.

94. (Original) The method of claim 91, wherein the partially unspecified term includes a restriction that comprises a computer program.

95. (Original) The method of claim 85, wherein the storing step comprises:

storing, for each of a plurality of contexts, a finite state automaton that represents the context.

96. (Original) The method of claim 85, further comprising the step of:

outputting one or more of the identified matches or portions thereof, thereby providing a result for the query.

97. (Original) The method of claim 85, further comprising the step of:

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assigning a score to a match or a portion thereof.

98. (Original) The method of claim 85, further comprising the step of:

storing a match.

99. (Original) The method of claim 85, further comprising the step of:

ranking a plurality of the identified matches or portions thereof.

100. (Original) The method of claim 99, wherein the ranking step comprises:

ranking an identified match or portion thereof based on the number of times an instance of the match is identified within a plurality of contexts.

101. (Original) The method of claim 99, wherein the ranking step comprises:

ranking a plurality of the identified matches or portions thereof based on information associated with a plurality of contexts identified in the identifying step that contain a match for the query.

102. (Original) The method of claim 99, 100, or 101, further comprising the step of:

outputting one or more of the identified matches or portions thereof in an order based on the ranking, thereby providing a result for the query.

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103. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need comprising the steps of:

storing contexts in which terms occur;

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion;

identifying one or more strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within the contexts; and

~~producing results in which~~ ranking each of said one or more strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more contexts.

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104. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need comprising the steps of:

storing contexts in which terms occur;

receiving a query, wherein the query comprises a term;

locating, within the stored contexts, information related to the term, thereby identifying information to fulfill the need; and

~~producing results in which~~ ranking said information resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said information within one or more contexts.

105. (Original) The method of claim 104, further comprising the step of:

outputting information related to the term.

106. (Original) The method of claim 104, further comprising the step of:

identifying, within a collection of documents, contexts in which terms occur, and wherein the storing step comprises storing a plurality of contexts identified in the identifying step.

107. (Original) The method of claim 106, wherein the collection of documents comprises World Wide Web pages.

108. (Original) The method of claim 104, wherein the locating step comprises:

locating a context that includes the term.

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109. (Original) The method of claim 104, wherein the located information comprises a context that includes the term.

110. (Original) The method of claim 109, further comprising the step of:

outputting the context or a portion thereof.

111. (Original) The method of claim 104, wherein the query comprises a plurality of terms and wherein the locating step comprises:

locating a context that includes each of the plurality of terms.

112. (Original) The method of claim 104, wherein the query comprises a phrase and wherein the locating step comprises:

locating a context that includes the phrase.

113. (Original) The method of claim 112, further comprising the step of:

outputting the context or a portion thereof.

114. (Original) The method of claim 104, wherein a context for a term comprises the term itself and a predetermined number of terms on either side of the term.

115. (Original) The method of claim 104, wherein the query comprises a partially unspecified term.

116. (Original) The method of claim 104, wherein a context for a term is stored as a finite state automaton.

117. (Original) The method of claim 104, wherein a context for a term comprises a left context for the term and a right context for the term.

118. (Original) The method of claim 104, wherein the locating step comprises locating a plurality of contexts, each of which includes the term.

119. (Original) The method of claim 118, further comprising the step of:

ranking the contexts, or portions thereof.

120. (Original) The method of claim 118, further comprising the step of:

outputting a plurality of the contexts, or portions thereof, in accordance with the ranking.

121. (Original) The method of any of claims 105, 110, or 113, further comprising the step of:

outputting an identifier or a location of a document that contains a context that is output.

122-131. (Cancelled)

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132. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for fulfilling an information need based on documents and an index stored on a computer-readable medium comprising:

memory means that stores computer-executable process steps; and

a processor that executes the process steps so as (i) to receive a query containing an unspecified portion, (ii) to identify one or more documents in the index that contain a match for at least a portion of the query, (iii) to locate one or more strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within the identified one or more documents, and (iv) to ~~produce results in which~~ rank each of said one or more strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more documents.

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133. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for fulfilling an information need comprising:

memory means that stores computer-executable process steps; and

a processor that executes the process steps so as to (i) receive a query containing an unspecified portion, the unspecified portion including an unspecified term,(ii) identify a string which is a match for the unspecified portion of the query within a body of information stored on a computer-readable medium, and (iii) ~~produce results in which~~ rank said string which is a match resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said string within a body of information.

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134. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for fulfilling an information need comprising:

memory means that stores computer-executable process steps; and

a processor that executes the process steps so as to(i) receive a query containing an unspecified portion, the unspecified portion including an unspecified term, (ii) identify a plurality of strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within a body of information stored on a computer-readable medium, and (iii) ~~produce results in which~~ rank each of said plurality of strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within a body of information.

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135. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for fulfilling an information need comprising:

memory means that stores computer-executable process steps; and a processor that executes the process steps so as to(i) store contexts for terms, wherein a context occurs in a document, (ii) store information identifying a document in which a context occurs, (iii) receive a query containing an unspecified portion, (iv) identify one or more strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within the contexts, and (v) ~~produce results in which~~ ranking each of said one or more strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more contexts.

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136. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for fulfilling an information need comprising:

memory means that stores computer-executable process steps; and

a processor that executes the process steps so as to(i) store contexts in which terms appear, (ii) receive a query containing an unspecified portion, (iii) identify one or more strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within the contexts, and (iv) ~~produce results in which~~ ranking each of said one or more strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~are ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more contexts.

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137. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for fulfilling an information need comprising:

memory means that stores computer-executable process steps; and

a processor that executes the process steps so as to(i) store contexts in which terms occur, (ii) receive a query, wherein the query comprises a term, (iii) locate, within the stored contexts, information related to the term, thereby identifying information to fulfill the need, and (iv) ~~produce results in which~~ ranking said information which results from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said information within one or more contexts.

138-139. (Cancelled)

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140. (Currently Amended) Computer-executable process steps stored on a computer-readable medium, the computer-executable process steps to fulfill an information need based on documents and an index also stored on a computer-readable medium, the computer-executable process steps comprising:

code to receive a query containing an unspecified portion;

code to identify one or more documents in the index that contain a match for at least a portion of the query;

code to locate one or more strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within the identified one or more documents; and

code to ~~produce results in which~~ rank each of said one or more strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more documents.

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141. (Currently Amended) Computer-executable process steps stored on a computer-readable medium, the computer-executable process steps to fulfill an information need, the computer-executable process steps comprising:

code to receive a query containing an unspecified portion, the unspecified portion including an unspecified term;

code to identify a string which is a match for the unspecified portion of the query within a body of information stored on a computer-readable medium; and

code to rank ~~produce results in which~~ said string which is a match resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said string within a body of information.

142. (Currently Amended) Computer-executable process steps stored on a computer-readable medium, the computer-executable process steps to fulfill an information need, the computer-executable process steps comprising:

code to receive a query containing an unspecified portion, the unspecified portion including an unspecified term;

code to identify a plurality of strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within a body of information stored on a computer-readable medium; and

code to ~~produce results in which~~ rank each of said plurality of strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within a body of information.

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143. (Currently Amended) Computer-executable process steps stored on a computer-readable medium, the computer-executable process steps to fulfill an information need, the computer-executable process steps comprising:

code to store contexts for terms, wherein a context occurs in a document,

code to store information identifying a document in which a context occurs,

code to receive a query containing an unspecified portion;

code to identify one or more strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within the contexts; and

code to ~~produce results in which~~ rank each of said one or more strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more contexts.

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144. (Currently Amended) Computer-executable process steps stored on a computer-readable medium, the computer-executable process steps to fulfill an information need, the computer-executable process steps comprising:

code to store contexts in which terms appear,

code to receive a query containing an unspecified portion;

code to identify one or more strings which are matches for the unspecified portion of the query within the contexts; and

code to ~~produce results in which~~ rank each of said one or more strings which are matches resulting from the query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said each string within one or more contexts.

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145. (Currently Amended) Computer-executable process steps stored on a computer-readable medium, the computer-executable process steps to fulfill an information need, the computer-executable process steps comprising:

code to store contexts in which terms occur;

code to receive a query, wherein the query comprises a term;

code to locate, within the stored contexts, information related to the term, thereby identifying information to fulfill the need; and

code to ~~produce results in which~~ rank said information resulting from said query ~~is ranked~~ in accordance with a frequency of said information within one or more contexts.

146-147. (Cancelled)

Claim 148. (Currently Amended) A method executed in a computer system of fulfilling an information need comprising the steps of:

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion, said unspecified portion including a predefined character sequence representing a matching restriction that defines at least one of: a syntactical criteria, a morphological criteria, and a criteria defined in accordance with a determination by a computer program; and

identifying one or more matches for the query in accordance with said restriction.

Claim 149. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need based on documents stored on a computer-readable medium comprising the steps of:

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion, said unspecified portion being a partially unspecified portion defining a particular set of one or more character sequences without including a wildcard character;

identifying one or more documents that contain a match for at least a portion of the query; ~~and~~

locating one or more matches for the query within the identified one or more documents; and

ranking each of said one or more matches resulting from the query in accordance with a frequency of said each match within said one or more documents.

Claim 150. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need based on documents stored on a computer-readable medium comprising the steps of:

receiving a query containing an unspecified portion, said unspecified portion defining a matching restriction without specifying one or more particular characters in said query;

identifying one or more documents that contain a match for at least a portion of the query; ~~and~~

locating one or more matches for the query within the identified one or more documents; and

ranking each of said one or more matches resulting from the query in accordance with a frequency of said each match within said one or more documents.